

# Staying out: Tenant-assistance Plan Works to Ease Former Inmates Into Society

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**By DIANE SPIVAK Post-Tribune**

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"Re-entry has a direct correlation to public safety and an expense to taxpayers. We need to assist some of Indiana's most vulnerable people, (to) successfully transition back into the community."

J. David Donahue, Commissioner

Of the 16,500 offenders expected to be released from Indiana's prisons this year, the state's penal system can expect to see more than 6,600 back behind bars.

Two state agencies hope they can change the outlook.

Indiana Department of Correction officials believe part of the reason is some don't succeed is because many have no place to live once they've served their time.

On Monday, at the Westville Correctional Facility, the DOC and the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority launched a pilot tenant-based rental assistance program aimed at helping ex-offenders find a permanent home.

The program is starting with the five counties that see the most incarcerations, including Lake, Porter and LaPorte, which will be served by the Northwest Indiana Re-entry Partnership.

Downstate Marion and Madison counties will be served by PACE/Offender Aid and Restoration.

It's part of the state's 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness, said Westville Correctional Facility Superintendent William K. Wilson.

The program does not include Indiana's sex offenders, who have strict housing guidelines following their release.

Department of Correction Director J. David Donahue said housing ranks with employment and transportation as the most significant elements of an ex-offender's success once he or she leaves prison.

"Re-entry has a direct correlation to public safety and an expense to taxpayers," Donahue said.

Northwest Indiana will receive \$170,000 of the \$500,000 program, to be funded annually with federal dollars, Donahue said.

"We need to assist some of Indiana's most vulnerable people, (to) successfully transition back into the community," Donahue said.

Housing and Community Director Sherry Seiwert said the new program works locally with landlords to place former offenders.

Kevin Simons, 40, an offender with a year to go on his sentence, said he lost his home of 19 years in Kosciusko County in a tax sale after he was jailed about a year ago.

"I heard about the program," Simons said. "It would be nice. My mother is in a retirement home. I have no other family to speak of and no place to go."

The program would affect Lake and LaPorte counties more than Porter County. Yvette Salinas, District Six parole supervisor, said of the entire district's 750 parolees, 450 are from Lake County, 100 from LaPorte County and 60 from Porter County.

Only about 3 to 5 percent of Porter County's parolees are homeless, compared to 7 to 10 percent in Lake and LaPorte counties.

### **About The Department of Correction**

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.

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